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A Study of Japanese Animation

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# A STUDY OF JAPANESE ANIMATION

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## INTRODUCTION

The conjecture that this paper puts forward is that it is important to understand the recurrent themes in Japanese animation as they relate to the societal concerns of Japan as a whole. I believe that one way of experiencing a culture is through their art, and by exploring the art of animation as a medium that fully integrates all levels of Japanese culture and is in turn integral to all social strata, I think I have come to some interesting conclusions on how to place *anime* within the Japanese historical and cultural context. By gaining a more informed opinion on Japanese culture, I think it is possible to better appreciate the *anime* that is so heavily influenced and encapsulated with the major themes running through Japanese life. In effect then this paper will be taking a sociological approach to the question of popular culture's ability in Japan to be reflective of the sociological concerns of that society. This is not to say that all shows consciously reflect Japanese life, but by extrapolation of recurrent themes one can construct a model of certain sociological issues in Japan. I have split the paper up into five sections each of which tackles a different theme, these sections are: Education, Social and Class Differences, Environment, Post-Nuclear Visions, and An Emergent Feminism. The main point that I hope to bring across in each section is a way of looking at *anime* through a cultural lens that will allow one to learn more about the *anime* by placing it within a greater context. By doing this I feel that the overall importance of *anime's* ability to teach foreign viewers about the society that creates it will become apparent.

There is a progression of the ability of Japanese animation to influence and form society. In the first place, *anime* can be read as merely reflecting society, next it can be seen as the unconscious dreams of society put into form, or it could be an attempt at social control and reform. For each of these theories, I have read articles that promote an individual one over the

others. In order to provide a frame for my paper, I thought it might be useful for you, the reader, to be conversant in these background theories that have influenced my own thought processes.

The first idea of mass media as reflective of culture is written about in *Movies as Mass Communication*, “It is more generally agreed that mass media are capable of ‘reflecting’ society because they are forced by their commercial nature to provide a level of content which will guarantee the widest possible acceptance by the largest possible audience. Thus, there is a definite tendency to create a product which consists of familiar themes, clearly identifiable characters, and understandable resolutions,” (Jowett and Linton, 83). In this respect all the *anime* I have reviewed does indeed reflect society in its content, however for some I would disagree that the attempt was made in the interests of securing the largest possible acceptance of viewers. This can be particularly seen in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, which is discussed in the section on the Post-Nuclear Vision. This show was created by Anno Hideki as a reaction against the complacency of *anime* fans in order to instigate a re-evaluation of the viewer’s expectations. Also, *anime* does not always have such understandable resolutions, in some cases the conclusion is a completely impenetrable morass that makes no sense until one has brought to bear on it significant amounts of outside materials and research. Although I do agree that *anime* is reflective of society, I also think that there is more to its power and appeal than that alone.

Another source I found relegated *anime*’s message as not even reflecting actual Japanese life but merely the unconscious desires of the Japanese people:

But be warned. What you learn about Japan through *anime* can be deceptive. This is not the way Japanese really live. This is the way they fantasize about living. These are their modern folk tales, their myths, their fables. This is not a peep into the conscious Japanese mind, but into the unconscious. (Levi, 16)

Although in some cases this might be true, some of the *anime* is very fantastical and does not reflect reality in any way whatsoever; however that is not the extent of *anime*’s range. Shows

that reflect school life or home life, do in fact present an accurate portrayal of the life of a typical Japanese family. Shows that reflect actual reality give people something to emphasize with and this is a reason for their enduring appeal. Of course there are some shows that do not reflect reality and perhaps the reason for this *is* a desire for something different. Some anime could be evocative of the creator's exoticization of their society in order to re-intrigue the viewing public in something Japanese, however indirectly. But, as I said, not all shows are creations of some kind of deep-seated desires in the Japanese psyche, and even if they were, I think that the *anime* that presents the fantasy of how they desire to live could in a sense be construed as a means through which its ultimate actualization could be achieved. In a way, the depiction of a fantasy could be seen as a dream for the future, a dream that could be trying to superimpose itself into the minds of the Japanese populace now in order to affect social reform for the future. This leads me into my next theory on anime, that of its ability to cause actual social change instead of merely reflecting social conditions.

In the *Introduction* to *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture*, the editor D.P. Martinez presents the twin theories of media as both reflector and shaper of society. It is this author with whom I felt the most connected in viewpoints as his ideas really struck a chord with my own preconceived notions on *anime*. His writing also manages to integrate the ideas of the two previous paragraphs in order to assimilate all aspects of the debate on how mass media is, at one and the same time, a product and an influence on society.

I have argued elsewhere that we might best understand these forms of narration, which are embodied in various types of the mass media, as myth (1992): myth not as false history, but rather as a series of continually re-worked narrations which *reflect* and *reinforce* the values of constantly changing societies. As Samuel and Thompson (1990) argue, these are the myths we live by: not neo-Marxist dominant ideologies, but something closer to a view of culture which *shapes and is shaped by society*. (Martinez, 2. emphasis added).



Bringing in the idea of media as myth, ties back into Levi's statements on the function of *anime* to present a mythical realm of reality, however as I disagreed with her, Martinez also disagrees that these media narrations are "false" myths. And in opposition to Jowett and Linton, he takes the reflective theory the step further to media reflecting back onto the society its own morals and possible solutions to the problems of society. In fact he states this later when he writes that "popular culture may mirror, or even attempt to resolve, moral and ethical issues for modern Japanese people," (Martinez, 12).

In my own paper, I have delved into these issues of how the *anime* shows that I discuss can be considered as reflecting and or shaping the Japanese culture that produces them. In this way my paper constitutes a sociological investigation of the modern concerns in Japanese life as they are represented in the popular culture medium of animation.

## EDUCATION

The first aspect of Japanese life that I would like to discuss is that of education. Many *anime* shows deal with school life in Japan, to name some: *Kareshi Kanojyo no Jijou*, *Kodomo no Omacha*, *I'll Make a Habit of It*, *Hana Yori Dango*, *Sailor Moon*, *Tenshi ni Narumon*, *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, *To Heart*, *Sakura Diaries*, and *Ranma ½*. The two that I will focus on in this section are *Kare Kano* (*Kareshi Kanojyo no Jijou*) and *Kodacha* (*Kodomo no Omacha*). Respectively these shows translate to “*His and Her Circumstances*” and “*Child’s Toy*.” In this particular section I would argue that the shows are not only reflecting the social situation of education, but are also trying to enact a reform beginning at the child’s level through the presentation of *anime* “propaganda.” Admittedly “propaganda” without the fascist/government controlled overtones generally associated with that word, as the show was not created by the government for the sole purpose of brainwashing students into being more focused on school work. However, the fact remains that one implication of, in particular—*Kodacha*—can be seen as the reform of child behavior in the classroom setting.

In *Kodacha*, the story line follows the life of a Girl named Sana, age 11, who is an actress. In her school, however, a boy named Hayama rules the classroom. Sana calls Hayama “the monkey boss,” because of how he leads all the other boys into disrupting the class and playing tricks. They are constantly reducing the teacher to tears, and the reason the teacher doesn’t try to stop them is because Hayama has a picture of her and one of the other teachers at the school kissing. Sana, goaded on by the other girls in the class, begins a campaign to bring Hayama down. The aspect of school life in the show that is of particular importance is the behavior of the children in the classroom setting where they refuse to pay attention. In an issue

of *Japan Quarterly* last year, an article on the “Chaos in Elementary Classrooms” was featured.

In this article Takahashi Shotaro wrote the following:

The high profile erosion of teacher control in Japanese elementary schools is a situation in which all the students—not just some unruly class member—defy a teacher who has to present all the subjects. Trouble typically emerges when the children do not take their seats when the bell rings. Instead they continue wandering about the room. Feuding children start to tussle. As the teacher watches helplessly, some children insult him or her; some get physical by lobbing paper planes at the teacher.

Until the end of World War II, such a situation was beyond imagination in a nation where looking up to teachers had been an ingrained tradition. Everyone was mindful of the axiom: ‘Walk well behind you teacher so as not to step in his shadow.’ The legacy remained well into the postwar years...Now no discipline is enforceable in a classroom that has become embroiled in chaos, and there is none of the bonding that once was common between children and teachers. (78)

In *Kodacha*, the boys in the class are the only ones who really defy the teacher, the girls merely watch. But other than that all of the above quoted passage holds true. There are quite often paper planes flying around the classroom, the boys also play ball, and at one point in the series, Hayama brings water guns to class filled with ink and the boys shoot the teacher and the girls. The power shift in classroom dynamics has its roots in the post-war disillusionment with those invested with leadership power due to the Emperor’s admittance of falsehoods on a national broadcast.

In the show all along the girls are helpless, even though they make it quite clear that they want to study and learn in their class. It is only through Sana’s efforts that Hayama is brought low by the use of a candid photo of him in his underwear. Then the classroom returns to normal and the teacher is allowed to do her job while all the children sit respectfully in their seats. In Japan I think this show would have quite an impact on the target audience of school children. By the creation of this show and its targeted audience being mainly composed of Japanese children the same age as the main characters, one factor behind the artistic vision, could in a sense be construed as social reform. When the children change from acting out in class to sitting quietly,

the moral of the story is obviously that the quiet child who is learning is the “better” of the two versions. Therefore not only can this show be “read” in the light of social critique on the actions of youth in class, but also as subtle reminder to children to behave well in school while taking advantage of the education being offered to them. I believe it’s safe to say that one of the best methods of influencing children’s actions is through what they watch on television; admittedly home life and peer pressure also play respectable roles. But honestly, one of the best ways to create change is by hiding morals in a pretty package (“propaganda”) that the children will open and accept without ever really being aware of it. The show *Kodacha* is full of humor and craziness, but it is also a gentle reminder to children to behave well in school.

In *Kare Kano*, the emphasis is also on behavior, but more attuned to grades than obeying the teacher. This reflects a social concern with the importance placed on education as a vehicle through which one can achieve entrance into a respectable university. A recent article in *Asiaweek* on the education system in Japan has this to say on the “exam grind”:

Entrance exams, of course, are an old story in Japan’s highly regimented education system. Every high-school student has felt the anxieties of *juken jigoku* (examination hell) that come with trying to enroll at a good university. In time, the pressures have trickled down the education chain. Now the cycle begins at kindergarten, where preschoolers are programmed to win places at prestigious elementary schools, linked to equally sought after high schools. (Murakami, 52).

The acceptance of “examination hell” reinforces the complete subservience of the Japanese to the overly exacting education system. The fact that it has filtered as far down as the kindergarten is an amazing perpetuation of a stereotypical social value.

In the show *Kare Kano* itself, the two main characters, Arima and Yukino, begin dating and because they are spending so much time together they do not study as much so that when finals come they both slip from top of their grade to lower ranks. They are immediately called into the principal’s office and berated for their lapses in grades. The principal tells them to stop

dating because they should be thinking more about their futures in this critical time of their lives. He says that once they have gotten into college they can resume dating, but until they are in good universities they must concentrate on their studies. Arima and Yukino refuse to obey this mandate, because they feel that there are some things more important than grades—love being at the top of their list. Because of their recalcitrance, their parents are called in, and they also say that some things are more crucial than grades. More precisely what they say is that their children are old enough to decide for themselves what they want and that they trust them to make the right decision. In the *Asiaweek* article, Murakami also wrote “An education system that valued exam scores above personal growth was traumatizing both children and their families,” (55). This lends further credence to the show’s attempts to present an atypical approach to education on the level of familial support. Instead of wrecking home life for the two main character, the show of parental solidarity in sticking behind their children’s decisions displays a shift in the Japanese value system as presented by the show.

The show reflects reality by presenting the Japanese tendency towards considering education to be of the utmost concern, even to the point where they consider it “with a nearly religious respect” (Shotaro, 81). However in recent years, the importance of school has begun to slide as evidenced by the fact that “last year [1999] about 128,000 children from three to 15 years old (a record) chose to enroll in alternative systems”—such as “free” schools, home schools, and Internet based schools. The main reactionary element of these alternative schools though is that they do not require exams, (Murakami, 54). The disintegration of a strict school system is possibly also one of the reasons behind the misbehavior of children written about in conjunction with *Kodacha*. It could also be why the reactions of Arima, Yukino, and their parents are not so strange because the utter reliance on this method of education has begun to be

revealed as not requisite for learning. In the past it might have been shocking to hear two students talk back to the principal, but as Japan has grown economically and branched out globally, the individuality and autonomy of its citizens has increased as well. No longer is everyone going to obey without question the rules set forth for them. At some point, everyone must make a stand for what they believe in and what they want, and in the case of *Kare Kano*, the battle is fought on a student's desire to live for something besides school. Not that school or studying is completely given up by Arima and Yukino. On the contrary, after winning the battle with the principal they both apologize to the principal for their rudeness and promise to study harder. The principal tells them that he was actually happy to see students that knew so well what they wanted, even if it was at odds with what he wanted for them, at least they knew their own minds unlike many of their schoolmates. After this Arima and Yukino strike a balance between studying, seeing one another, and their many extra-curricular responsibilities. The main point in this story line was to portray high school life as it involves both educational and social aspects, and the moral would be then that both should be seen as equally important in the growth of an individual. High school is a major time in the life of a Japanese youth, because in it they are discovering who they are. After they graduate high school, college life is very easy and seen by most people as a vacation before one enters the real working world. And then once one enters the "real" world, life becomes very set in the working day. Yukino's father even says in *Kare Kano* that "One day in high school is more important than one year afterwards."

The focus on the youth of Japan in these two shows that I have described is also an important one, because they are seen as the future and the process of their growth as vital to the nation. If the children are supposed to eventually raise the value of the nation in a global setting, or even just to increase the standing of a city or prefecture, they must have the best morals

ingrained in them from childhood onwards. Education in schools is mandatory, but their education after school through things such as *anime* is also of increasing importance. That is why such shows as *Kodacha* and *Kare Kano* provide a real-life glimpse at the mechanics behind education. One way of viewing the trend in *anime* for school dramas is to consider the makers as attempting to round out the scholarly education of the next generation by constantly presenting them with images of learning. These two shows do actually display opposing ways of looking at education through their main characters words and actions. In *Kodacha* I have argued that the show strikes a balance between reflecting the actuality of elementary school while at the same time providing a semi-subliminal attempt at effecting reform in the school system. This reform is based on the result of the children becoming more driven in their studies. In opposition to this *Kare Kano* celebrates the happy medium between study and play. So while I would argue that both shows are incorporating visions of an “ideal” educational system, the fact that they do not agree on the method points can only point to a non-consensus on the issue itself in Japan. However the fact alone that education has spawned so many varied reflections in the pop-cultural medium of *anime* proves its importance in the Japanese eye as a hotly contested one of social reform.

## SOCIAL AND CLASS DIFFERENCES

Not so long ago Japan functioned as a feudal state in which caste was severely differentiated. In this time period the samurai, or warriors, were the ruling class. Next in line of hierarchical importance came the farmer, the artisan, and lastly—the merchant (Seidensticker 30). In this section of my paper I will explain Japan's feudal system and how today that system has changed, and how—most importantly for this paper—that change is reflected in animation.

In the Tokugawa period, the country was run by a shogunate. Tokugawa Ieyasa was a shogun who was the head of a group of samurai with enough power to control all of the other shoguns. In this era, the samurai were at the head of the hierarchy; however the merchant class has the most money. In time this economic factor became a problem for the ruling class who were all indebted to various merchants. The friction created by economic disturbances was one of the contributions to the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Emperor Meiji had, until this point, been only a titular head of the country behind the military force of the ruling shogunate clans. However, in 1868 he was reinvested with some political and ruling power. Also in 1868 a bill was passed entitled “Equality of Four Social Classes” which abolished the feudal clan system (theoretically) (Kosaka 2). In this period eight static classes actually developed and were arranged as follows: Aristocrats, Capitalist Class, New Middle Class, Landlord Class, Peasant Class, Old Urban Middle Class, Working Class, and Lowest Urban Class (Kosaka 3-5). Following the end of World War II in 1945, land reforms were enacted in order to dispense with, in particular, the landlord class (Kosaka 6-11). These reforms helped to levelize urban and rural classes somewhat and to lead to a more “Westernized” democratic society. However, I would argue that even today remnants of class distinction still exist quite strongly within the language and mind-set of the Japanese individual.



“One’s social position, as defined by his or her relation to other members of the whole, will determine the very specific types of language he or she uses when addressing other members,” (Young 191). Within the Japanese language itself there are set grammatical rules that determine one’s place in society when they are used in every day speech. There are different methods of saying such set phrases as “Thank you” depending on how polite one must be. If, for example you were speaking to a superior (in age, rank, job importance, economically better off, etc.) you would most likely use the most polite form. On the other hand, if speaking to an inferior you could use a less polite form. There are also different suffixes that can be added to proper names in order to denote superior-inferior relationships. These suffixes are typically always used and it is very rare, outside of the family circle, for someone to be referred to simply by the first name alone.

Within the mind-set of the individual, I would like to turn to two examples in *anime* that show quite definitively the continued gulf created by class differences. First of all in *Kareshi Kanojyo no Jijou* (*His and Her Circumstances* or *Kare Kano*) the two main characters of Miwazawa Yukino and Souichiro Arima have very different social classes as evidenced mainly through family situations and outward appearance of wealth. In the series the two freshman high schoolers go to each other’s houses to study. The first time Yukino visits Arima’s house she is amazed by the grandeur of it. Arima has his own room, while she shares one with her two younger sisters. In Arima’s house everything is very quiet, sedate, and elegant. In Yukino’s house the walls are thin enough to hear through and the family is loud and boisterous. Arima’s family obviously has a maid and/or a cook, while at Yukino’s her mother is always vacuuming or serving food. We learn through the course of the show (26 episodes total) that Arima’s father is a doctor who owns/manages a prestigious hospital and Yukino’s father is a ‘salary-man,’ an

employee of a large corporation. The differences between the two families are subtly shown and it is only through Yukino's amazement at the Souichiro's wealth and her embarrassment around her own family that the social gulf becomes clear. And yet, that social disparity is made obvious and it is through its existence in *anime* that one can conjecture it still exists within Japanese society itself.

In a second *anime* series, *Hana Yori Dango* (*Boys before flowers* or *Hanadan*) which is not as recent as *Kare Kano*, the two main characters have an even wider chasm between their respective social statuses. These two characters are named Domyouji Tsukasa and Makino Tsukushii. The Domyouji family is one of the wealthiest in Japan, owning at least ten islands, homes around the world, a five star hotel chain, a couple corporations, and so on. In school Tsukasa is always surrounded by three other boys, all the first sons of other major families in Japan. And it is in this school, Eitoku High School, that he first meets Tsukushii. The school itself is for the wealthiest families and is otherwise impossible to get into except on scholarships for academic brilliance. It is with such a scholarship that Tsukushii is able to attend Eitoku. Tsukushii's family is very poor and in the course of the series her father loses his job, forcing the family to move from one small apartment to an even smaller one. Her parents are forcing her to attend Eitoku (she'd rather go to the one her junior high friends attend) because they hope she will be able to meet rich marriage prospects or eventually garner a higher salary through education, (Eitoku High is a stepping stone to a prestigious university).

In *Hanadan*, Tsukasa continuously refers to the poverty of Tsukushii's family and also offers her money. Tsukushii, in response to him giving her brand name clothes, declares herself a "No Brand Girl." In effect Tsukushii is attempting to define herself, not by her family situation or social status, but by her own individual integrity. Tsukasa, on the other hand, is the spoiled

inheritor of a vast estate, who never asks but only commands, and is the sole heir to an illustrious and affluent family name. Because of their mutual attraction and love however, Tsukushii and Tsukasa must deal with the obstacles class differences can put in the way of a social mobility or freedom to associate with whom one pleases.

The show thus describes class and social differences while at the same time attempting to show that the barriers of class are ideological more than anything else and can be surmounted by the realization that if a “rich” person can fall in love with a “poor” person, then class divisions shouldn’t mean anything to stand in their way. One of the aforementioned obstacles that are put in the path of the two lovers is Tsukasa’s mother who attempts to buy off the Makino family so Tsukushii will leave Tsukasa alone. His mother is very worried that her son might marry this “poor” girl, and she will do anything to stop this intermingling because she has a very high opinion of her own social status. This is born out in the fact that her daughter, also tried to marry “beneath” her station, and the mother had to step in there as well. So Tsukasa’s mother goes to Tsukushii’s house with a briefcase of cash and offers it to Tsukushii’s parents, in the process calling Tsukushii a “pebble” that must be removed from Tsukasa’s path. Tsukushii’s mother dumps a contained of sugar on Mrs. Doumyouji’s head and informs her that they have more pride than, something which obviously a wealthy person couldn’t understand. Her outward show aside, Mrs. Makino actually does this because she is offended at being offered a paltry sum when she still hopes that Tsukushii will marry Tsukasa and have access to all his wealth.

In the end the most important aspect of this show, and others like it, is to show the stereotypical class differences that are perpetrated in Japanese society. Although there may not be much difference between two people, if there is a divide in their social status then their relationship becomes controversial and generally forbidden. The gulf between classes stems

from the feudal period and was carried over into the period following the Meiji Restoration, and then an economic growth occurred, which benefited mainly the top classes and has further added to the societal concerns over class issues.

The show *Hana Yori Dango* itself accentuates the social divide between its two main characters, I think on purpose, in order to show the possibility of a breakdown in the deep chasm that exists in the hierarchical social order. At the end of the show, the two characters do end up together much to the chagrin of his stuck-up, socialite mother. In a way therefore I think this show is beginning on an individual level to advocate the disintegration of social status and moving into a realm where social equality exists, as evidenced by the equal relationship between Tsukasa and Tsukushii. I do not think that has been achieved in Japan at the current time at all, but I do think this show is reflective of the concerns in Japan over the economic class divisions that are a force in determining social position.

In the cases of these two series, it is apparent that although in the aftermath of World War II, a democratic system was superimposed upon Japanese society, remnants of past aristocracy retained some power. Particularly in the case of *Hana Yori Dango* the tradition of primogeniture is still existent. It is a fact of human civilization to desire social equality but to seldom achieve it, although in the two shows the relationships between the two main characters displays a yearning on the behalf of at least two filmmakers for an ideal egalitarianism.

## ENVIROMENTALISM

Japan has long had a tradition of appreciating the natural world that surrounds them. Living with so many people on a chain of rather small islands means that in order for city dwellers to enjoy nature it has to be contained in order to conserve space. Hence, one can look at the way in which Japanese artistry has expressed and reconceived nature in forms of simple brilliance. Nature has been captured in woodcutting, paintings, haiku poems, and aesthetic gardens. From the early reliance in religion on images of nature, the natural has pervaded most activities of Japanese life. In visiting temples and shrines in Japan it is not uncommon to see a carefully sculpted rock garden or some small piece of priceless art that renders nature immemorial. However, these small space-preserving representations of nature are not the only outpourings of a country so in tune with the world around them. In *anime* nature is once again represented in stationary background scenery and moving images of the natural world. Two shows in which nature plays an integral role and in which an environmentalist message is being propagated are *Gegege no Kitaro* and *Mononoke Hime*.

*Gegege no Kitaro* is an *anime* show of only thirty minutes in which the main character Kitaro, (a popular image of the *anime* world born in 1966) is introduced on film. In this mini-movie, Kitaro is a *youkai*, or a supernatural being similar to a ghost. The animator of Kitaro is named Sigeru Mizuki and one fan said of him “His *youkai* world is spooky, fearful and strange, but cheerful also beautiful...Long long time ago, people were living with nature. You can feel it from his illustrations” (<http://www.1st-softgarage.co.jp/mizuki/top-e.html>). In this movie entitled “The Great Sea Monster,” greedy men are looking for a special spring on an island that will grant them immortality. However, *youkai* living on the island are annoyed with the greedy Japanese people who keep coming and messing up their island in their search for the spring.

Kitaro heads to the island in order to rescue a friend but when he arrives he is turned into a giant green monster, the ancestor of the whales, and the reincarnation of the island *youkai*'s god Zenokuronodon. Kitaro/Zenokuronodon is sent by the island *youkai* to Japan to destroy the Diet building (similar to our House of Congress). Kitaro's friends try to find a magic herb which will change him back into himself but bulldozers have destroyed all of it in landscaping and building enterprises. Finally however he is returned to his own body and Japan is saved from destruction. At this point, the Japanese admit it was their fault for being so greedy and going after the sacred spring water and from then on they promise to try to live in harmony with the *youkai* and with nature. The symbolism in this story is readily apparent in the shape Kitaro takes of a large green monster which represents the greed of the Japanese in destroying their own country by tearing up islands and bulldozing their own countryside. In this film, nature is portrayed as being protected by 'spirits' or *youkai* who try to preserve it in its purest form. Humanity is seen as the greedy destroyer of that purity who is punished by the *youkai*. In the end, as with all happy endings, everybody leaves friends and the viewer is left with a sense of hope that harmony will prevail and the beauty of nature will be preserved.

In the second film, *Mononoke Hime*, a similar situation of nature being destroyed by humans is presented. In this movie though, the lines of good and evil are not so clear-cut. The message is still that nature must be protected and preserved, but there is an even greater emphasis on the ability of humans to coexist peacefully by building around nature.

*Mononoke Hime* depicts a long ago time period wherein forest gods walked the earth, spoke, and cared for nature. In this time period a boar was poisoned by a lead bullet and went 'mad' or became a cursed god (*tataragami*). On a rampage the cursed boar god tore through the

land and eventually came upon a small village where he was killed by Ashitaka, a prince of the tribe. In defeating the boar though, Ashitaka was wounded and inherited the curse of the god.

Wanting to rid himself of the curse, Ashitaka forsakes his village and travels to the West to discover how the boar came to be cursed and how, through his understanding of the cause, he could be cured. He eventually reaches a mining fortress where the people are under attack from the wolf god Moro and her two pups as well as her adopted human daughter, San. The wolves are angry with the miners for cutting down a vast forest and for polluting the natural environment in which they live.

In the mining town Ashitaka meets Eboshi-sama (Lady Eboshi), the leader/founder, and discovers that it was she who shot the boar god and caused the curse. Yet, even though Eboshi-sama was the instigator of the destruction of nature, she is not all bad in that she is providing a home for prostitutes and lepers who would otherwise have no where else to go. Minnie Driver who was the dubbed voice of Eboshi-sama in the American release said of her character:

She's not an environmentalist, but she's a humanitarian. She's absolutely bent on creating a world that is safe for these people who've been cast out in the world and in becoming self-sufficient and in not having to rely on the Emperor or the army. But in creating that world she's destroyed something and continues to want to destroy. She doesn't understand how including the forest is actually her responsibility to her people as well, and she learns that at the very end and decides to change. People can learn all sorts of things, but to actually act on what we've learned, that's the difference. (Bond)

This view of Eboshi-sama points to a delineation into shades of gray instead of black and white, good and bad characters. All the characters are trying to preserve something whether it is human life or animal life. The movies refusal to show either side as "evil" reveals a conciliatory message to the audience to come to an understanding of both sides. One reviewer in *Animerica* wrote:

*Mononoke*. . .takes a concept long forgotten by modern audience—that nature is ruled by an intelligent life force—and treats it in a highly realistic fashion. While the visuals

convey the contrast between human and animal attitudes towards nature, the moral issues raised by this theme are presented in terms of character. . .The intensity of the emotions and the refusal of the filmmakers to reduce everything to black and white mark this film as a mature work of art which doesn't pander to its audience but asks it to consider both sides in the conflict. (Camp)

This attitude that originates from the film gives a serious dilemma to its viewers and they must come, along with the fictional characters, to the conclusion that both sides need to compromise in order to coexist in harmony. In the end of the movie after the Shishigami (supreme forest god) has been shot (again by Eboshi-sama) that is when the human characters, such as Eboshi-sama, begin to realize that they are a part of the cycle of birth and death that nature imposes. They also begin to comprehend that instead of trying to fight against that system they should be working on how to live inside of it. With the death of the Shishigami a new cycle of birth begins in which the mining colony will rebuild with better intentions of preserving the forest and the forest gods come to an understanding that their time as the rulers of the land is coming to an end. And so although part of the magic of the land has been destroyed by man's impact and by industrialization, another part of the forest still survives and makes its own impact on mankind. The film, then, points out the two opposing forces of industrialization and the environment, as well as their impact on one another. Miyazaki himself said, "I've come to the point where I just can't make a movie without addressing the problem of humanity as part of an ecosystem" (McCarthy 185). This quote symbolizes what Miyazaki strives to express in his film *Mononoke Hime*. By showing the interrelationships between man and the ecosystem, Miyazaki can comment on how man must realize himself to be part of the cycle of death and rebirth that is typified in the Preserver/Destroyer complex of the main forest god. Once man comes to this understanding he can bring himself to live more in harmony with the natural world around him instead of trying to build bulwarks against it in order to protect himself from death, (as Eboshi-sama does when trying to get the Shishigami's head which grants immortality), and in order to



distance himself from the natural/“formidable” world, (as the townspeople do in building IronTown removed from the environment, and when they cut down all the trees around themselves as part of the fortifications).

Although there is no happy ending, the stark reality of what man does to nature and how that affects man’s own course of life provides a telling moral to Miyazaki’s audience. *Mononoke Hime* is an image of a time when humans could have decided differently to live in nature or to destroy nature in a quest to clear a space for themselves. The movie presents the two paths which could be taken, one is taken by Ashitaka who decides to stay with the humans, living and working in IronTown (*Tataraba*). The other way is taken by San who will continue to live in the forest, protecting it as best she can.

These two paths presented in *Mononoke Hime*, as well as that of the youkai and the humans in *Gegege no Kitaro*, display an emphasis on mankind’s equal role in preserving the environment with the spirits that originate from Japanese mythology and religion. Both movies do present mankind as a part of the ecosystem and by showing what they are doing to their own environment a message comes across that something has to be done to keep what natural beauty we have left. In *Mononoke Hime* and *Gegege no Kitaro* the main theme was a respect for nature in which a future could be made that would allow man and nature to coexist in harmony. Japan’s ties to nature through religion (the primitive gods represented in the two films) are showcased in these two films that present to the world at large one way of viewing humanity and the environment as forces which act on one another to create our world. Miyazaki and Sigeru can thus be seen as environmentalists depicting their fears for the environment and coming to a rebuking conclusion/urging to humanity to protect and coexist with the natural world. The impetus for their obvious concern must be based in a broad concern in Japan over the effect of

modernization and industrialization that has sometimes overridden the importance of the environment.

## THE POST-NUCLEAR VISION

Following the dropping of the atom bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the postmodern vision of what the apocalypse looks like developed a very specific outlet in *anime*. As a medium through which one has access to visual images of how the Japanese have come to terms with the atomic bombings, animation was and is a key factor. The *anime* series I have chosen to discuss as it incorporates the theme of nuclear power is *Neon Genesis Evangelion* directed by Anno Hidodeki and from the film-company Gainax. This series consists of twenty-six episodes and two movies. In the interests of focusing this section, I have elected to concentrate on one consequence of the atomic bombings—the symptomatic quality in its very nature to cause both destruction and a subsequent rebirth. This theme of rebirth is one which exists at the root of Japanese society—inherent in its Buddhist underpinnings.

The Japanese as a people did not react to the nuclear bombings as an outrage, but rather as a tragedy. The tragedy of the nuclear holocaust could be seen in terms of something that occurred, but from which the Japanese would rebuild the destroyed areas. Later on they realized the discrepancy between their view of the bombings and the Occupation's view; however they then altered their own view only slightly.

The initial response. . . is one which the West has never understood. The bomb, like the war, like death itself, was something over which no one had any control; something which could not be helped; what we mean by an 'act of God.' The Japanese, in moments of stress if not habitually, regard life as the period of complete insecurity that it is; and the truth of this observation is graphically illustrated in a land yearly ravaged by typhoons, a country where the very earth quakes daily. The bomb, at first, was thought of as just another catastrophe in a land already overwhelmed with them. (Richie, 21)

With the multiple outlooks on the event, the attempts at working out how it should be dealt with through the medium of film could be varied and confusing. In the beginning, obviously, the bombings were presented merely as Ritchie puts it as “an ‘act of God.’” However as time went

on and the Western view of the bombings as atrocity came to be integrated into the Japanese ideology, the exposition of nuclear visions also evolved. However, Richie claims the Japanese take on the bombings never reached the stage of considering them an ‘atrocity,’ instead “the Japanese substituted an elegiac regard which has remained as the single constant element in the changing interpretations of the Hiroshima symbol,” (22). In applying the idea of film as an elegy to *Evangelion* the comparisons are obvious to one who has watched the whole production. In the final episodes and in the movies, the extinction of the entire human race is discussed in terms of loss and what would be missing in such a state. The main character Shinji Ikari, is a boy in possession of the power to destroy or save the world and by the process of a long and thorough examination of his psyche he discovers how much he needs people.

The series is almost an elegy for the population of Earth on its own. It displays the best in each of us along with the worst while offering a commemorative look back at what we have been. Most importantly though, *Evangelion* displays what people mean to each other. If there was a theme in this movie that had predominance over all the others this would be it. In a soul-searching look at the ‘self’ Shinji makes the discovery that there is a reflection of one’s own self in the minds of everyone one has come into contact with. All of these selves together inform the existence of one’s own self, and without these mirrors to check ourselves against we would cease to exist as our lives would become empty and without shape or form.

Following the idea of the event as a “tragedy” the show also displays a remarkable ability for rejuvenation in its ending sequences. Although, almost everyone on Earth has perished in the Third Impact, the protagonist is told, “Don’t worry. All living things have the ability to return to their original form and the heart to go on living. Anywhere can be heaven as long as you have the will to live. After all, you’re alive and you can find the chance to achieve happiness

anywhere.” The possibility of “happiness” points towards a tragedy that can be overcome given time. The rebirth of the character is thus achieved even after mass devastation. And in his (Shinji’s) desire for happiness, he salvages one other person so that he will not be alone. Symbolically enough this other (who provides him with shape through the reflection of his self in her mind) is a female who can contribute to the actual rebirth of the species. The show thus ends on a note of optimism about the regeneration of the world through this one pair of individuals. Even in the face of the greatest adversity there is the chance of salvation.

This theme of end and beginning again is a repetitive cycle that *Evangelion* encompasses in its most basic form. The idea of an apocalypse is utter destruction, however by drawing upon Christian mythology, *Evangelion* displays a truly cyclical stream of events. At the end, as previously mentioned, there is a repetition of the Adam and Eve syndrome which links to the idea that though destruction can be immense, a few are always spared to begin again. In order to better understand the events that led to the Third Impact I’m going to give some background on the prior Impacts. In *Evangelion*, on August 15, 2000, (a date in August very close to the atom bombings of August 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> 1945) an event called Second Impact occurred which was a repeat of the Impact that killed the dinosaurs. The Second Impact melted all the glaciers in the Antarctic and caused a shift in the global weather patterns killing many and making many areas uninhabitable. The Third Impact is the one that concerns the entire series, because it is the one that some men are trying to plan and bring to fruition themselves. This Impact is one in which mankind will return to the state he existed in before the First Impact—thus, cycling back to the beginning to begin anew. Before the First Impact, man existed as one entity with one mind and no body. This was a pure form where no one was separate from anyone else and the ‘self,’ as the

series defines it, did not exist. This then is the cycle that the film encapsulates, a death of mankind but at the same time a rebirth into his original substance.

A quote which I think amply illustrates and connects the main points of the death/rebirth cycle concerns the alignment of the post-nuclear and the post-modern:

If the underside of the West's modernization narrative is romanticism (the obsessive, all-absorbing subjectivity and all-consuming presence from which the postmodern seeks to escape by positing an end/closure to consciousness), in Japan the underside of the imported modernization narrative is the myth of cyclical rebirth, of endless eternal desire and suffering. That this notion is tainted with 'pre-modernity' by its Buddhist associations is secondary to the still vivid sense that Japanese modernity has been marked by a cycle of death and rebirth. Hence, the syndrome of Japan as Number One testifies not so much to a knockdown drag-out fight with the West as it does to the ability to stay, survive, be reborn: the ultimate symbol of that truth is the historical experience of the atomic bomb and the devastating destruction of Japan. For Japan then, unlike the West, postmodern means not the nuclear sublime but post nuclear, and the issue is not whether survival is possible, but how to survive in what has always been recognized as a precarious existence. (Wolfe, 229-230)

The two movies of *Evangelion* are appropriately titled *Death* and *Rebirth*. In a society rooted in the Buddhist conceptions of life as effervescent and in a constant state of death/rebirth, the bombings seemed like just another 'act of God', and from these pre-modern roots, the modernist view of the atomic age was as a death which destroyed a part in order for the process of rebuilding to begin. For *Evangelion*, the death occurred in the absorption of mankind by the "Human Instrumentality Project" which created the Third Impact, but the rebirth occurred in one individual's refusal to join this release of self. Thus another aspect of the show is that of the individual prevailing over the group mind promoted during World War II. Not only then is the show reflective of a post-nuclear ideology, but also of a post-war one. Shinji Ikari, through a long process of self-definition, decided that he would rather live in the world than leave it and it was from his decision that a rebirth was possible. Of course the state of reality was a precarious one being based on one 14 year old boy's force of will, but it still provided a basis for a model of

what the youth of Japan can affect through their own determination. In his decision Shinji said, “I hate myself. But I might be able to love myself. I might be allowed to stay here. Yes. I am nothing but I. I am I. I will be I. I want to stay here! I can stay here!” Perhaps, *Evangelion* could be seen as a post-postmodern admonition to the next generation on how to conduct their lives in reaction to their parents.<sup>1</sup> However, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* can be perceived as a Japanese postmodern view of the post nuclear world in which destruction is elegized and death is only the precursor to rebirth. In fact another character says, “The fate of destruction is also the joy of rebirth,” further reinforcing the theme within the show.

A final image of the death/rebirth iconography in the series occurs in the second movie (*Rebirth*). In this scene Shinji is remembering a childhood event when he was building a pyramid with some other children. The others’ mothers came to get them, but Shinji’s mother is dead so eventually he is left alone in the park. He continues to put finishing touches on the pyramid though until it is perfectly formed. He stands up from his crouch and stares at his work for some time before stamping it down. At this point the destructive subliminal message is clearly seen. After he has demolished the pyramid, (which is emblematic for NERV headquarters—also shaped as a pyramid—and the last bastion of hope for preventing the Third Impact through most of the series), Shinji starts to cry before beginning the process of rebuilding. This scene ties in the Japanese’s elegiac regard for destruction with Shinji’s tears and their ability to rebuild after devastation; which has one further symbol in the scene. When Shinji begins to refashion the pyramid, the camera slowly pulls backward to reveal a fish-eye view of Shinji in the middle of a park. In the distance there are two large hills (breasts) and on either

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<sup>1</sup> The final image of the series itself (not the movies) is text from the director that reads:

“Thank you my father. Good bye my mother.  
And to all the children, Congratulations!

side of him at diagonals are strips of forest (vagina). Shinji is thus represented in the center of a vaginal opening in the most blatant rebirth image of the entire show.

In conclusion, this section has strived to show the theme of death/rebirth as symptomatic for the post-nuclear vision in Japanese society. The complex of death/rebirth is a deep-seated one in the Japanese psyche as a part of their historical background, including natural and man-made disasters, as well as their religious beliefs in Shinto and Buddhism. As a show that reflects society *Evangelion* does a good job of integrating many elements of the nuclear and post-nuclear images and ideologies of Japan. *Evangelion* also reinforces the cultural message of the possibility of regeneration in the face of defeat. The show could also therefore be read as a unifying vision for a post-nuclear society to take as its basis for rebuilding.



## AN EMERGENT FEMINISM

At the end of *Adolescence*, the *Revolutionary Girl Utena* movie, the two main protagonists have freed themselves from the male dominated world and have entered the “real” world where they are released from the make-believe world’s cycle of pain that they had hitherto been subjected to. As an expression of an emergent feminism in Japan, the TV series and movie of *Revolutionary Girl Utena* make the point that woman is no longer willing to be dominated by a male vision of the world. This show can be seen as a reaction against other *anime* shows that present weak female characters, as well as *hentai* that perverts them into representations of male pleasure only. Japanese culture as a whole has long had a history of female subjugation, and thus it is interesting to see shows such as *Utena*, which are beginning to speak out against gender distinctions. The reason I have chosen to focus on *Utena* is because I feel it has one of the strongest methods of presenting its message through the guise of a homosexual relationship between the two female characters. By developing a feminist *anime* series, the artist and director have addressed the cultural concern in Japan over the role of women, not only in society, but also in representations of that society as they are reflected or reinforced through art. And then in taking that extra step of portraying the main characters as not only fighting against a patriarchal world, but also renouncing the company of men for the pleasure inherent in recognizing another woman as an object of love, they are creating a new representation of a celebratory femininity.

To begin with, I would like to explain some of the aspects of the show that make it feminist in nature. One of the first things is the revealing of the female body as her own choice—along the lines of the idea of reclaiming words for a feminist use.<sup>2</sup> In Japanese pornography, a male dominated area that *Utena* seems to be trying to counteract, the female is

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<sup>2</sup>See Inga Muscio. *Cunt: a declaration of independence*. Seattle: Seal Press, 1998. for a feminist’s re-appropriation of the word “cunt” from its corruption by masculine usage.

generally violently portrayed by body parts: “they are often reduced to being body parts, toys, and slaves in the male fantasy world,” (Kinko, Ito 128), “close ups of body parts, especially of large breasts, crotch and bottom, are abundant in these stories,”(Kinko, 129). In contrast to this, in an article written on the Modern Girl of the early 1900’s pre-war by Miriam Silverberg, there is a discussion of the modern female as being reflected in her body, specifically her legs: “the legs of the Modern Girl were a product of the ability of the human spirit to shape the human form; her legs symbolized the Modern Girl’s growing ability to create a new life for woman,”(Silverberg, 242). In this context the author is discussing the way in which the Modern Girl was specifically defined by her “short hair, and long, straight legs” (Silverberg, 242). No longer though were these piecemeal representations of a violent sexual nature, but now in the “modern” age they had become a symbol of her fight to change social norms. In *Utena*, the main character Utena Tenjou wears a school uniform that displays her long perfect legs to perfection. In the series she has long hair, but in the movie, which is far more forthrightedly feminist, she has short hair. Utena thus becomes the perfect symbol of a Modern Girl. She is taking on the appearance of one who is no longer bound by ancient traditions of the ideal female or the objectification of her body inherent in Japanese pornography. Utena is instead “reclaiming” her own body as an element that defines who she is as a woman instead of remaining bound by male stereotypes or the limited view of pornography.

In continuation of her liberation the Modern Girl should also change her dress, ““women’s bodies, and the messages that clothes can add, are the repository of the social definitions of sexuality,”” (Silverberg, 242). In *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, Utena creates her own school uniform as a combination of the male and female ones. As a message about her sexuality, the clothing that she wears displays her ability to straddle the line between male and female

depiction of gender. Utena's sexuality is thus called into early question in the show as her clothing bridges the gap. Then in the movie *Adolescence*, Utena comes to school in a wholly new uniform that far from displaying her legs, as in the Modern Girl symbol of progress explained above, completely covers her legs. In this uniform Utena seems to be standing in a new position of feminism on a level above that of the 1920's Modern Girl. The uniform of the movie is black and white and constitutes a jacket and pants with a beret on her short-cropped hair. The idea of Utena in a masculine garb that one finds in the movie is impressive as a statement of progress even from the series. Along the way of developing the character, the artist and the director coalesced the vision of Utena into a feminine symbol of change, through her clothes, her attitudes, and what is accomplished in the two different patterns of series and movie.

The most interesting thing about the change from series to movie is in the way that it can be seen as a progression in feminism from the beginning of the series to the end and from there into the movie. The creative vision has progressed from early feminism in Japan to a new emergent feminism being explored in the relationship between male/female and female/female dichotomies. I would compare the entire *Utena* line to the history of feminism in Japan based on an article by Miriam Silverberg, in which she writes:

The cerebral New Woman has been romantic rather than realistic; she had wielded ideas, not economics; she had imitated male habits instead of attempting to create a separately bounded life for women. In contrast, the Modern Girl was more interested in shaping the materiality of everyday existence. (248)

The New Women were some of the earliest feminist thinkers in Japan. They wrote magazines dedicated to the freedom of all women as well as pioneering the way for women to be independent of common cultural stereotypes. The Modern Girl was depicted as the daughter of the New Woman by some (Raicho, for example), and in her behavior she displayed a continuation of some of what the New Women had been espousing on the achievement of gender

equality. By taking over masculine dominated language, wearing clothes chosen for her own self-expression, aggressive sexuality, speaking her mind in public, etc; the Modern Girl was almost an actualization of the New Woman goals.

However, some critics disagreed that the Modern Girl was really even in existence, that rather she was a media product with no actual social goal in the struggle for female liberation.

Silverberg also wrote:

Hiratsuka Raicho's two versions of the heroine appeared in "The Modern Girl as She Should Be." The first was a young woman with time and money to fashion herself a brightly colored ensemble of Western clothing with matching hat in order to attend the cafés on Ginza. This seemingly liberated woman, however, was not free: she was the object of men's physical desires, and while she might appear upbeat, she was in fact depressed. The real Modern Girl, in contrast, would have a social conscience. (249)

This ties back into the above quote, in that with this "social conscience" the real Modern Girl would actually be able to achieve the reshaping of "the materiality of everyday existence." In relation to *Utena*, the beginning of the show could be read as Utena following the guidelines of the New Woman, in that she imitated male fashion and speech without actually trying to create something new. She became a product of the male world instead of refashioning a female one that allowed freedom of expression. Then as the show progressed, Utena became more a realization of the Modern Girl as she proclaimed herself as fighting for a feminine reason—in the show this would be the bond of friendship that develops between her and Anthy Himemiya, the other female protagonist. In the beginning, Utena fought for the desire to become a "Prince," however her desire to protect Anthy because of a female friendship eventually overrode her desire to only be a prince. By doing so Utena began to dissolve the shackles that had tied her to only imitating the masculine world, and instead she began to fight for a revolution of the value system between male and female. However at the same time, as Silverberg paraphrases Raicho, Utena was still the object of men's "physical desires," particularly in the person of Touga who

wants Utena to be his. Finally at the end of the series, and then even more so in the movie, Utena became a realization of the true Modern Girl who has the ability to recreate everyday existence: to revolutionize the world. The title then for who Utena ultimately becomes could be termed the Modern Woman, a grown up version of the Modern Girl, no longer so interested in the exterior or symbolic quality of the clothes or the body, but in the actual interior release of her true self: her real feminine nature in the recreation/rediscovery/revolution of the world.

Looking at the ideas of another feminist theorist, Laura Mulvey, there is a connection between *Utena*'s ability to present a new vision of femininity in reaction to the normally masculine dominated language of film. In her essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey wrote the following:

This article will discuss the interweaving of that erotic pleasure in film, its meaning and in particular the central place of the image of women. It is said that analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article. The satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represent the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked. Not in favor of a reconstructed new pleasure, which cannot exist in the abstract, nor of intellectualized unpleasure, but to make way for a total negation of the ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film. The alternative is the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire. (Mulvey, 200).

Mulvey's paper concerns itself with the influence of male patriarchy on film as unconscious stimuli and how that pattern of male vision must be broken down in order to create a "new language of desire"—a new art form based not on patriarchy or matriarchy but a state of nonduality. The final sentence in the above quote is the most reflective of this—putting the past in its place, "transcending" limitations, and radical deviations from the expected—Mulvey is envisioning a revolution in the structures of film and gendered life itself. I do not believe that *Utena* actualizes Mulvey's goal, but it can be read as a beginning. The two main characters are throughout the series and movie fighting in reaction to the male dominated visions of social

customs, and in the very finale of the movie when they re-enter the “real” world it could be thought of as Mulvey’s new land of free cinema. Even though I feel that *Utena* does express a new form in the artistic images that flow from a female-centered vision, I do not see them as negating beauty/pleasure as Mulvey proposes them to do. *Utena* is a revolution in feminist terms and ideologies, but it is not a post-feminist breakdown of gendered differences all together.

Moving onto the show itself, the idea of Utena’s feminist revolutionizing of the world comes from the actual text of the series, in which a duelist will come, who will achieve the power to transform the world. A common refrain in the movie is when the Student Council Members speak the following lines:

If it cannot break out of its shell, the chick will die without ever being born.  
We are the chick, the World is our egg.  
If we do not crack the World’s shell, we will die without truly being born.  
Smash the World’s shell. . .  
. . .For the Revolution of the World!

In the show the World is eventually recognized and displayed as the make-believe shell of a world created by a male (Akio) who was attempting to control events and in specifics, his sister, (Anthy). The dominating relationship he held with her comes from a sense of shame that she carries. In the story, she attempted to save him from dying but in doing so she denied his presence to others who needed him. She was the first witch and also the first representation of all woman-kind. “Women” thus become associated as an evil entity—witch—who must be punished for her action in trying to overtake control.

The inception of the narrative in the punishment and re-punishment of the female witch lends itself to Helene Cixous’, a literary feminist critic, theory on theatre: ““With even more violence than fiction, theatre, which is built according to the dictates of male fantasy, repeats and intensifies the horror of the murder scene which is the origin of all cultural productions. It is always necessary for a woman to die in order for a play to begin,””(Jeffords, 83). *Utena* is

structured as a play, complete with the requisite chorus element of three shadow figures who frame the action in each episode. Also the storyline is rooted in the original sin of a female who transgressed against the patriarchal figure and is now being punished by being eternally stabbed by flights of spears (phallic) in the world of make-believe while her actual self is trapped within a coffin.

This female is Anthy Himemiya, and it is she that Utena releases from punishment that in turn causes the revolution of the world within the show. This revolution also causes a breakdown in the cycle of female victimization that Cixous is citing. This however was not the revolution that the male, ruling characters expected or desired. It is not clear what they did expect, but I believe it had to do with an unconscious desire to be free from the shell even though in the end their attitude towards leaving it was based on fear of the unknown reality. In effect, the predominantly male student council was merely playing at revolution and actually enjoyed the male-centered world that had been created for their pleasure. Utena's successful revolution then was a subtle one in which she maneuvered around the male powers and created a gradual, but steadily increasing, cracking of the world's shell, rather than the "smash" they were expecting. And it was really only through a two pronged effort that this occurred at all, because it was through Utena's actions that the shell was cracked enough for Anthy to escape from punishment, and once she had effected this first release Anthy's character in the movie displays a radical shift from the original, shy retiring nature of the series Anthy. Then in the movie, the cracking of the World's shell was completed by the two of them together when they escaped from the make-believe world out into what they termed the "real" world where they could recreate themselves, and for the first time really be themselves.

The image of birth in this process is also an important one, as from the student council quote above; they need to cause the revolution in order to be born. In a way, everyone in the make-believe world has not truly been born yet. They, for the most part, still exist in coffins where they are incorporated into Akio's creation, but are not really themselves. By freeing Anthy, Utena actually pulls the top off Anthy's coffin. At the end of the movie, the character of Utena and Anthy must force their way out of a grinding metal device that is slowly squeezing inwards on them, and by the time they are free of it, they have been reduced to nudity. The process is very similar to that of a birth. They are being squeezed out of the make-believe world in order to be born into the real one.

A final point that I would like to make in the connections between feminism and *Utena* is that of the use of music. In an advertisement for the Feminist Movement in Japan the following was written:

Women have already kicked off their heavy shackles and escaped from the dungeons of their darkened hearts. What lies before us now is for us to pour into the streets like rain in a sun-shower. What is left is the deafening roar of the factories, the tips of the spires of thought attacking the heavens. Lining up with people we move forward into the world of all living things. Friends, at times like this we need a song that will sing, exhort, exalt, and push forward for us. (Silverberg, 253)

If this issue was addressed to *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, I think that the theme song of the TV show would answer the call:

*Heroically, with bravery, I'll go on with my life,  
But if the two of us should get split up,  
by whatever means...*

*Take my revolution*

*In the sunny garden, we held each other's hands,  
drew close together and soothed each other with the words,  
Neither of us will ever fall in love again.  
Into this photograph of us smiling cheek to cheek,  
I took a bit of loneliness, and crammed it inside.*



*Even in my dreams, even through my tears,  
even though I'm being hurt,  
reality is approaching now, frantically.*

*What I want now is to find out just where I belong,  
and my self-worth, up through today  
Heroically, I'll throw away my clothes 'til I'm nude,  
like the roses dancing all around me, whirling free.*

*But if the two of us should get split up by whatever means,  
I swear to you,  
I will change the world. (Yasuyuki)*

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has consumed a large portion of my life as I have been working towards it ever since I watched my first *anime* show when I was 13. The whole point of my thesis has been finding the cultural factors that are “reflected, reinforced, fragmented, re-created, or created anew” through the medium of Japanese animation, (Martinez, 14). In doing so, I focused primarily on what *anime* could tell us about Japan as a country, as a societal whole, and/or as a director’s prerogative. In this conclusion I want to move away from that in order to contemplate the role of *anime* as a global product consumed by the far away many who are definitely on the outside of the country that creates it. My point in this is to show that even as animation is a cultural commodity that is an integral part through its reflected subject matters of the country of Japan, it is also having a huge impact on other cultures. Specifically I can see that here in the United States on the West Coast *anime* has become a readily recognizable part of our culture as well. The fact that it has made such a steady infiltration that one can grow up watching *anime* and not even know that it is a product of Japan, says something about its ability to transcend identity and become a fluid, marketable item.

Since *anime* began to travel to America, the ties between our two cultures have been steadily growing, particularly in the younger generations who are growing up watching *anime* in their own homes, just as their adolescent counterparts in Japan are doing. As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the time of rampant Americanization of other countries certainly continues, however, at the same time, we must recognize and accept the affect that other countries are having on our own culture. Possibly you could go so far as to say that it raises the question of whether or not we are experiencing the “Asian-ization of America” (Barker, 1A). Barker goes on to say in her article in *USA Today*, that the enthusiasm for all things Asian “epitomizes a phenomenon that’s

been percolating for several years: the marriage of East and West, as Asian cultural forces increasingly influence, inform, and inspire American cultural icons.” Some of the examples she sites are: “McDonald’s tucks Hello Kitty toys into Happy Meals. Levi’s uses *karaoke* to peddle jeans. Budweiser morphs ‘Whassup?!’ into ‘wasabi’ and makes a national buzz out of a Japanese condiment. And Hollywood embraces a Chinese-language film [*Crouching Tiger*],” (1A). This just all goes to show the effect that Japanese and other Asian countries are having on America. And the fact that all the examples cited are those of media forms shows the ability of advertising to appeal on a mass level as representative of a culture. *Anime* fits into this category perfectly because it condenses Japanese culture into an easy to watch package that can be commercially released in the States, dubbed in English even, in order to appeal to the masses.

The main influences in the realm of *anime* are in fact these dubbed, watered-down *anime* series that have been broadcast on national television stations in the last decade. Two of these are *Sailor Moon* in the early 90’s and now *Pokemon* in 1998 and 2001. Also there is a deal between Disney and Studio Ghibli, a well-known company in Japan, to release 3 of Studio Ghibli’s movies here in U.S. theatres. The first of these was *Mononoke Hime* (*Princess Mononoke*) in 1999 with the voice talents of Gillian Anderson, Billy Bob Thornton, Billy Cruddup, and Claire Danes dubbed in. Due to *Pokemon*’s success on the WB Kid’s lineup, another *anime* was added to the station in the fall of 2000 entitled *Card Captor Sakura*. Also the Cartoon Network has been showing *anime* such as *Sailor Moon* and *Dragon Ball Z* for years. And this year they are also broadcasting *Gundam Wing* and *Outlaw Star* in their after school line-up. There are also numerous stores across the country from which one can purchase *anime* merchandise, including videos, posters, cels, cards, clothing, and many other miscellaneous objects. Then there is the Internet with its wide range of sites pandering to any desire you have

for *anime* paraphernalia. Next are the *anime* conventions, several of which happen each year. Just this summer, for example, there was a very large one in Los Angeles, California entitled Anime Expo, (<http://www.anime-expo.org>). This convention was complete with: hundreds of *anime* enthusiasts, rooms devoted to showing *anime* all day long, a theatre to show movies, discussion panels headed by *anime* celebrities (directors, animators, and voice talents), a ball room for a special dinner and a masquerade ball, and a huge room with row upon row of booths selling *anime* merchandise. Finally, across the nation on college campus, Anime Clubs exist with (at least on our campus) quite a large membership.

Predominantly I would say that *anime*'s influence is felt the strongest by college level age groups and downwards from there, however this affect on the youngest generations could have some interesting possibilities in relationships with Japan in the years to come. One hypothesis for this fascination could be the fact that we as a generation coming of age in the new millenium are quite far removed from World War II. As a group within our society then we can indulge a Japanese obsession without any traces of fear, regret, or guilt. In Barker's article she also wrote:

A generation is coming of age at a time when the USA's major economic and political competitors are Japan and China, not the former Soviet Union. And today's kids who clamor for egg rolls in their lunch boxes, Seattle Mariners slugger Ichiro Suzuki at the ballpark, and Pokemon on the playground are tomorrow's grown-ups who stretch through yoga, travel to Thailand, and collect *chinoiserie*. (Barker, 2A).

Although she voices some concerns about how this could be merely a passing interest that will soon fade, the future still looks as if it will be informed by an Asian style and a population educated through media, fashion, food, and exercise to be well-informed on Asian culture.

Perhaps even as this paper analyzed the sociological concerns evident in Japan through animation, it is also possible to examine the effect of Japan on America's popular culture as a societal concern. Antonia Levi briefly looks at this consequence in her book on *anime*:

A funny thing happened on the way to the culture wars. We got run over by some cartoons. There we were, happily debating whether to focus education on multiculturalism or Western Civilization, and the kids made their own choice with *anime* and *manga*. (137)

Thus, a generation has chosen multiculturalism and the country has been opened up to influences ranging from fighting females, space battles, classic Chinese and Japanese texts turned into animation, eternal love stories, and some of the wackiest most brilliantly funny stories to originate from anywhere. It is a step we've taken at this point into the welcoming arms of Asian popular culture and I for one am not looking back.

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